DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 692 CG 012 307

AUTHOR Davies, Bronwyn
TITLE The Culture of the Child Versus the Culture of the Teacher.
PUB DATE Aug 76
NOTE 16p.; Best Copy Available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; *Childhood Attitudes; Children; Elementary Education; Research Projects; Role Perception; *Student Attitudes; *Student Teacher Relationship; Student Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; Values

ABSTRACT

An ethnomethodological study with children aged 10-11 reveals that childrens' view of school, of school values and of friendships differs markedly from the adult view of these matters. In some cases these differences may lead to irreconcilable conflicts between teacher and learner where the teacher is unable to recognize the child's point of view. This study finds that, at least in the early stages of his profession, the teacher experiences a high level of personal vulnerability and is primarily concerned with issues of classroom control and respect for others. The child's frame of reference emphasizes self-interest and the satisfaction of personal needs and desires. Thus it may be difficult for the adult to take the child's views into account. (Author)

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THE CULTURE OF THE CHILD VERSUS THE CULTURE OF THE TEACHER

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Bronwyn Davies,
Centre for Behavioural Studies in Education,
University of New England.

August, 1976

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Definition of the term 'ethnomethodology'

Ethnomethodology refers to the methods used by a particular social or cultural group to make sense of the world they live in.

Just as to "do science is to employ an interpretive schema for constructing a sensible and intelligent environment" (Turner, 1974) so too, in their own particular way do other groups of professionals, or even just other groups, employ such interpretive schema to make intelligible the environment they live in. Students of ethnomethodology then are concerned to locate the methods used by the group in question to make sense of their environment, e.g. the assumptions that are taken for granted, the categories or labels that are considered legitimate, the meanings that are attached to these particular categories, the forms of reasoning that are used to support decisions that are made, the meanings that are given to various activities (both amongst group members and amongst outsiders) and so on and on. Examples of questions that the ethnomethodologist will find relevant are:

> How does the actor or the observer negotiate everyday behaviour?
>
> How does the actor in everyday life order and assign meanings to objects and events in his environment?
>
> Are the ethnomethodologists' descriptions of events generalised and abstracted to a point where the actor would no longer recognise the original meanings? If so, what has he done? i.e. has the observer taken the experiences of the actor and coded them differently from the way that the actor would code it?
>
> What relevance have the actor's understandings and the observer's understandings for the social interaction?

To reiterate, the ethnomethodologist is interested in the ethnomethodology employed by the group of people in question. Each group has their own ethnomethodology; the ethnomethodologist is in

the business of trying to describe that ethnomethodology in such a way that the meanings are not abstracted so as to be meaningless to the people whose ethnomethodology is being described. In effect what ethnomethodologists attempt is to go beyond the limits of any particular conceptual system and beyond the limits of the concepts available to the researcher, by making relevant the concepts, perspectives and insights of the people being studied.

World view of the child from child's point of view (age 10-12) in contrast to adult point of view: Introductory comment

If the world view of a child is studied from the child's point of view, a different picture may emerge than that generally available from the adult's point of view. Children aged 10-12 have been described as "latent", (Erikson, 1965), learning skills necessary for adulthood (Sandstrom, 1968), "receptive to social and cultural influences" (Sandstrom, 1968), undifferentiated according to sex (Bühler, 1935), or even at a decisive stage where the child must prepare for adult roles (Erikson, 1963). It might be observed that these theories are developed very much from the adult point of view. The questions the theories have addressed themselves to are related to the child's progress towards adulthood. Even play is described in these adult oriented terms. Play is preparation for adult life (Gross, 1968). Play is the recapitulation of the evolution of man (Hall, 1968). Or, play is learning skills necessary for social development (Bühler, 1935). How would children view these statements about themselves? Would such statements make sense in relation to

the problems the child perceives in his own world? Is progress towards adulthood dominant in the child's consciousness or are there other problems of more critical interest? Holt (1965) and Hargreaves (1972), amongst others, have pointed out an incongruity between the way teachers (as representatives of the adult world) and children, view the process of learning. They have shown that the intent of the child and the intent of the adult can, even when the interaction flows smoothly, be at cross purposes. The teacher is intent on the content matter to be learned whilst the child is intent on pleasing the teacher, or at least not raising his ire. For the child the subject matter <u>in itself</u> may be almost irrelevant. Getting by, or perhaps even receiving some praise are more important considerations from the child's point of view than is the actual subject matter. But perhaps even these considerations are secondary to the child. Other aspects of his life, unimportant to adults may be of even more interest than the learning process and the interaction processes associated with it. An example of a radically different perspective on school occurred when I asked a child, in all seriousness why he liked a certain school and the child replied, again in all seriousness, that it was because the tuckshop was better supplied with a certain variety of sweets than other schools' tuckshops. The adult is likely to find such a response a bit foolish or may even consider that the child is having him on. After all, school was what was asked about, not the tuckshop. But perhaps the tuckshop is more central for the child than the classroom. The mistake the child make was in answering from his child's point of view instead of switching, as children are required to do, into the adult world and

answering from an adult point of view. In fact, research with children is bedevilled with this very problem: children are very skilled at gauging adult consciousness and producing the answer that makes sense to the adult. To a large extent this is what social maturity is about: providing answers and explanations which make sense to the other. But where the researcher is interested in the child's point of view and does not want to hear explanations manufactured for his own adult ears, he has problems. In this context, a child's answering "I don't know" is informative rather than irritating because it reveals, on many occasions, instances when appropriate explanations, in adult terms, are not known in relation to the particular question asked. Conversations amongst groups of children are perhaps one way of tapping the child's world view, though there is no guarantee that an adult's presence with a tape recorder will not in fact produce "adult appropriate" conversation. There are circumstances however, where some adults can be defined by children as "OK, one of us, someone who won't tell the teachers", etc. i.e. someone who is considered to be part of the children's rather than the teachers' team, who may be privy to the child's point of view. Where too, the adult adopts a low profile in the conversation, it is possible that consciousness in terms of other children present may dominate. In the conversation about school and tuckshops, for example, the children dominated the conversation as they seriously considered the point that had been made:

(OK now Jack, tell me what you think of the class that you're in?)

Jack: Oh, I like it better than any other school. Except for X school.

Jane: Erh - that's awful!

(Did you go to X school for a while?)

Jack: No, I never went there but my brother went there.

(What do you think would be good about X school?)

Jack: Cause they buy icecreams, lollies, scrummos.

John: Not scrummos!

(Don't you have those at the tuckshop here?)

Jane: But you've got to eat them before you go to class!

(indignant - in ref. to X school)

(What do you like about this school Jack?)

Jeff: You can just about do anything.

Jack: Oh.

Jane: You get more things here.

(Let Jack tell me will you?)

(interruption again)

Jack: You know them iced coffee, stawberry milk and, new packet of chips, nut chew, oranges and apples.

(Other children interject or amend this food list, all talking at once and with great enthusiasm.)

Values - from teacher's point of view and from child's point of view

The specific problems faced by a teacher can be seen to generate certain classroom norms which in turn serve as a basis for values held by the teacher. The problems perceived by the teacher are obviously very different from the problems perceived by the pupils. If norms do develop in response to perceived problems then the norms for each team, teacher and student will be somewhat different. Questioning of a group of 31 Diploma in Education students about the fears they had in relation to teaching revealed two major problem areas and two minor ones. Fear about one's own person and potential

attacks upon it was the basic problem mentioned by 23 of the 31 students. In other words, from the adult point of view, maintenance of an acceptable view of oneself in the classroom is a major problem. The second major problem area, mentioned by 16 of the 31 students was potential chaos in the classroom. They feared being unable to control the students. Two problems, mentioned by only 5 of the students, were related to the teacher's responsibility for the development of the student, and for the development of satisfactory relationships between teacher and student. In other words the teachers' perceived problems, at least on initial entrance into the teaching profession are related to maintenance of their own personal integrity, and to their own ability to control the situation.

Small wonder then, that when asked to specify what values should be taught to children in school, that these potential teachers most frequently mentioned respect for others. Respect for others, or for those in authority was mentioned by nineteen out of 31 student teachers in contrast to respect for self which was only mentioned 4 times. Respect for the values of society (which included honesty, responsibility, obedience, and in general how to be an acceptable person) were mentioned by 25 of the 31 students. In effect the values which student teachers want taught in classrooms are those which will have their pupils behaving in a controllable and accepting fashion, such that their self will not be violated and chaos is no longer a problem.

All very reasonable one might say. Yet how do these values seem from the child's point of view? Ethnomethodological studies indicate that children have their own view of these matters. If we

take some of the values mentioned by teachers it is interesting to contrast these with the child's viewpoint:

Honesty in children is useful because one knows where one is with a child who always tells the truth.	There are always two points of view, the child's and the teacher's. Very often, explanations to the teacher's in terms of the child's point of view are unacceptable, e.g. in response to "Why didn't you do it?" the teacher is unlikely to accept "I didn't feel like it", "It was boring", "I preferred to watch television", "It was too much trouble". All of these are legitimate explanations from the child's point of view, but he soon discovers that this is not what the teacher wants. The teacher wants an explanation acceptable to the teacher. Thus "I forgot" will sometimes get by, but preferably "It was too difficult" or "I did do it but I lost it" or "My little brother drew all over it" or "My mother was sick and I had to look after her", and so on. These legitimations will save a lot of conflict and are obviously what the teacher is after. The child's problem is to develop an acceptable view of himself which he can hardly do if he is forever in conflict with the teacher. It becomes acceptable, therefore, to "lie" in order to maintain decent relations with the teacher, by providing him with what he wants.
To respect those in authority	Some adults are worthy of respect and others are not. Outward forms of respect for those who are not worthy of respect may engender feelings of self abrogation and disgust along with feelings of powerlessness and frustration.
To have a good attitude towards work, i.e. to value it for its intrinsic merit, or sometimes to value it for future rewards (good grades or good jobs)	School work is often boring, apparently pointless and sometimes consists of blatantly time-filling exercises. It can be engaged in to gain teacher or parental favour. For successful students it can give rise to feelings of self esteem and pleasure in achievement or accomplishment.

Where teachers fear chaos in the classroom, they are likely to use whatever control mechanisms that are available to them. For example, where they know students care about the grades they receive

they might resort to refusing to give good grades, or even grades at all, unless good behaviour as well as good work is produced. With current internal assessment for School Certificate, Principals are free to make the School Certificate conditional on such things as regular school attendance, co-operation in class, respect for authority of school and so on. Not only are they free to do so, but pupils they have taught can threaten to rate someone down if they behave badly or similarly to offer them the rewards of higher grades if they behave well. In other words, the teachers can use the grading system as a control mechanism.

This, of course, is not in the interests of the student. One of the few ways he has of letting a teacher know that his teaching style is unacceptable is to "muck about" in class. As the delinquents in Werthmans "Delinquents in schools: a test for the legitimacy of authority", point out, they will behave where they sense that the teacher is treating them fairly but will create trouble if they discover that grading is based on anything other than the actual work done. Their problem is to find out which teachers they can trust to treat them fairly and to accord good behaviour to those whom they decide they can trust. The teachers, on the other hand, are anxious about controlling these unruly students and will use the one thing they know the students care about in an attempt to control them. In this case the problem perceived by each group, the student group and the teacher group can lead to prolonged and apparently irreconcileable conflict. In view of the fact that 70% of the trainee teachers questioned feared lack of control, then this type of conflict is most likely. Yet as Werthman notes of his

delinquents:

> "When gang members are convinced that the educational enterprise and its ground rules are being legitimately pursued, that a teacher is really interested in teaching them something, and that efforts to learn will be rewarded, they consistently show up on time, leave when the class is dismissed, raise their hands before speaking, and stay silent and awake." (Werthman, C., in Cosin, B.R. (ed.), P.48, 1971.)

Friendship - mainly from the child's point of view

Teachers and pupils can be seen to have very different views of what friendship is. For the teacher, or for the adult in general friendship is related to rather complex notions of love, affection and loyalty, terms which have a strong emotional and experiential base and are not therefore, to be taken lightly. Children appear, from the adult point of view, to have a rather fickle attitude towards friendship, and to engage in an unnecessary degree of fighting and bickering. In fact it would seem to adults that children do not "really understand" what friendship is. One trainee teacher in discussing a research project on childhood friendship comments: "Once again it must be emphasised that friendship to many children is a feeling they find hard to explain, probably because friendship is an abstract thing."

However, ethnomethodological research (currently being undertaken by the author with 10-11 year old children) has revealed an elaborate and complex understanding of friendship which is quite unlike the adult model. Friendship norms for children are based on the perceived problem of vulnerability - isolation. Friendship is a pact which says, in effect, "You won't attack me and I won't attack you. I'll play with you and you will play with me." As long as this bargain holds then the friendship remains.

To better understand this style of approach let us attempt to get at these feelings of vulnerability on the part of the child. Children, when they enter school, ar asked to take part in a world where they are relatively powerless, where the new rules are strange, and where success is based on a currency not fully acquired by them yet: namely, language. In their world gestures, tone of voice, facial expression, can have greater impact than verbal content. They know when to be offended or afraid or pleased not so much by what was said to them but by how it was said. Many of the cues generated by other children are assumed to be aggressive even when they are not intended that way. For example, "Dark people are mean sometimes. When the bell rung I went to put the paper in the bin and there were four dark people. I didn't understand them (what they were saying) but I didn't like it. I put the lid on the bin as they said it so I didn't really hear it." Such an interpretation on the part of children stems from their extremely powerless condition within the school system. They are not yet able to empathise sufficiently with other children to recognise that they also are vulnerable, and a mode of interaction where attack is the best defense is developed. Children develop a complex repertoire of insults and may sometimes develop a hierarchy of importance amongst themselves based on fighting skills, physical or verbal. Knowledge of who is a better fighter than whom becomes critical knowledge in such a world since each child needs to know when to attack and when to retire when establishing himself in the status hierarchy.

In such a world, too, friendship becomes extremely important. Friendship guarantees an area of safety since it is based

on a pact, not unlike political agreements, which says "I won't attack you if you don't attack me and you won't attack me if I don't attack you." Where friendship is based on such a pact each party to the agreement must watch very carefully to make sure the agreement is not broken. Any act which can be construed as breaking the pact will result in a flare-up and temporary or permanent loss of friendship. Thus, the passing of notes to other children about one's friend, playing with other children, words spoken in an apparently irritated tone of voice, and refusal to help with school work have all been observed as acts of "treachery" within the friendship. Since friendship can thus end suddenly and violently many children have a "potential friend" lined up to take over if anything goes wrong.

Solidarity in friendship is increased if it is a highly convenient friendship, i.e. if the friend lives nearby, plays the same sport and is in general available for a large part of the time. These convenient friendships are preferable because they extend the area of safety over a greater period of time. Solidarity can be further increased if the pact can be extended to a group or gang, rather than remain as a single pair. Children with high status in the classroom tended to form a very strong clique which had unquestioned power and rights in the classroom. These groups (in the particular classroom observed there was one male and one female group) were envied and admired by the rest of the children. One child who refused to acquire status by fighting, shed a bitter tear (in private) when he explained that the girls from the high status group, who were very attractive, thought he was weak and hopeless.

This assumption he claimed was on the basis of his not being a member of the tough top group of boys.

Aboriginal children, who are even more vulnerable in the school system than white Australian children are renowned for their fighting skills. Their pact of friendship with each other is usually stronger than that with friends outside the Aboriginal group. Thus an Aboriginal child will punch up his so-called "best friend" who is white if he hears that his friend has insulted another Aboriginal child. And he will do this without even stopping to ask whether the insulting behaviour had actually occurred.

Letting your friend know that you are still his friend is achieved by adopting a different pattern of behaviour with him than with everyone else. Thus it may be necessary to fight with "not friends" in order to more clearly define who are friends. Thus:

(What makes John such a good friend?)

He just stops out of it. We hardly have a fight, me and John. Only unless its called for.

(What do you like about John?)

Don't know, just a good friend, a close friend.

What makes a good friend?)

Dunno!

(What is it that makes him different from people who aren't friends?)

Just don't like the other people, and just like John, that's the way I make friends.

It is worth noting that the adult imposed notion of "liking" was not part of the scheme of friendship as this child viewed it. The

researcher had to push hard to get an adult appropriate response. It may also be worth noting that this conversation took place with a popular, tough child who was very skillful socially. This form of distinguishing friends from not-friends is used with girl/boyfriend relationships as well. In conversation with a girl who did not belong to the high status group of girls and a boy who belonged to the high status group of boys the following discussion occurred:

(What are the boys in the gang like?)

Oh - they're alright (looks at John). I've got nothing against them. When they get together against a girl they're a bit bossy. They have extra rights to everyone else: they don't like me but I like them.

(Do they give you a tough time sometimes?)

Oh yeah. Sometimes I get all these names off them and that.

(Do they do that to girls in the group?)

Oh no, they don't do it to <u>them</u>, they like <u>them</u>. (Laughter)

(Tell me John, why pick on some girls and not on others?)

Oh I dunno, could be some girls are nicer.

Thus to sum up, it appears that the ethnomethodology of children leads them to a different form of relationship where friends are concerned than we experience in our adult world.

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